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ABSTRACT

The paper offers an analysis of how the misclassification of school children as cognitively disabled for placement in public school special education classes may have positive as well as negative consequences. This approach is used to criticize the sort of unilateral prohibition of misclassification mandated by the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (P.L. 94-142). Architects of the Act are seen to argue that misclassification inevitably causes stigmatization and other ill effects. The paper shows that to understand the experience of failure for the full range of children encountered in schools, one must take the degree of disability, the occurence of official identification, and the acceptance of stigmatization by students as three distinct and independent variables. The intersection of the three variables is noted to provide an eight-cell typology. Examples of each type drawn from the author's ethnographic studies of special education programs in public schools are offered to show that one of the cells are empty. It is concluded that banning misclassification protects children in some of the cells but at the cost of harming children in other cells. (Author/SBH)

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# Labeling Versus Stigma: A Typology of Deviance in Special Education

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by

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ABSTRACT: Labeling Versus Stigma: A Typology of Deviance in Special Education.

This paper offers an analysis of how the misclassification of school children as cognitively disabled for placement in public school special education classes may have positive as well as negative consequences. This approach is used to criticize the sort of unilateral prohibition of misclassification mandated by the recently implemented federal Education for All Handicapped Children Act. The architects of the Act argue that misclassification inevitably causes stigmatization and other ill effects for children. This paper shows that to understand the experience of failure for the full range of children encountered in schools, one must take the degree of disability, the occurrence of official identification, and the acceptance of stigmatization by students as three distinct and independent variables. The intersection of the three variables provides an eight cell typology. Examples of each type drawn from the author's ethnographic studies of special education programs in public schools are offered to show that none of the cells are empty. Banning misclassification protects children in some of the cells but at the cost of harming children in other cells.

Labeling Versus Stigma: A Typology of Deviance in Special Education

Over the past twenty years public schools have increasingly been required to follow procedures of due process in administrative actions which might reduce the equality of educational opportunities available to children (Rubel 1977). New restrictions on student suspensions and on the application of negative labels like "mentally retarded" to children is bringing about major institutional change. Schools are required to serve more and more difficult students at the same time that the reforms are reducing the small amount of administrative discretion available for managing the complex authority relations in schools.

This paper discusses the irony that as educational opportunity is legally equalized, the resources for equalizing actual opportunities through organizational practices are reduced. I discuss the logic and the consequences of due process legislation, applied to children with learning disabilities (LDs) or who are mentally retarded (MR) assigned to special education classes, which is most recently represented by the federal Education for All Handicapped Children Act known as PL 94-142. This discussion is based upon 12 months of daily participant observation work in California LD classes and selected regular school classes (Milofsky 1974; 1976). While my work was done prior to implementation of the Education for All Handicapped Children Act, the observations are relevant to present conditions because California, along with Pennsylvania and Washington, D.C. (Kirp, Buss and Kuriloff 1974; Kirp, Kuriloff and Buss 1975), was one of the first jurisdictions to mandate due process controls on student classification and because the basic form of the California regulations have been reproduced in the federal legislation.

Those lobbying for legal reform in the late 1960s and early 1970s noted that the majority of children labeled MR in public school special classes were minorities, that there is a good chance the IQ tests used to classify them are biased,

and that the tests were often administered carelessly if at all as children were placed in special classes (Bryant 1974; Chalfant and Schefflin 1969; Chandler 1969; Garrison and Hammill 1971; Grinspoon and Singer 1973; Hobbs 1975; Kamin 1974; Lambert and Grossman 1964; Mercer 1973; Sameroff 1978; Schrag and Divoky 1975). A familiar sociological argument about the importance of labeling and secondary deviation to creation of deviant careers was adopted (Lemert 1967). Being classified MR or LD when in fact students are intellectually normal was claimed to be inherently stigmatizing (Senate Report #94-168 1975; Dexter 1964; Kirp 1973; Schrag and Divoky 1975). Such children are not only blocked from access to the more advanced school work which "normal" children receive in non-special (regular) programs. As Henry (1963:283-321) and Valentine (1974) argue in providing examples of how particular children react to being labeled failures, the stigma attached to failure may be emotionally scarring. Rist (1970; 1973) and Rosenthal and Jacobson (1968) go further in presenting data that minority and lower class children who fail do so because schools systematically socialize those students into careers of failure. Special education reforms are intended to prevent gratuitous stigmatization and thereby to reduce the frequency with which children are socialized into these careers of failure.

My field experience suggests this theory of school failure is oversimplified. Consequently, reforms derived from it aimed at making it difficult to misclassify children may cause more students to be socialized into careers of failure rather then fewer. The reforms are insensitive to the realities in school districts in two ways.

FIRST: Like Goffman in Stigma (1963), reformers have assumed that disfigurement, labeling and stigmatization, with its associated secondary deviation, are a single phenomenon (Rowitz 1974). This is understandable with Goffman's example taken from Nathanial West's Miss Lonlihearts of the girl who had no nose. Without a nose a person will be shunned and must go to great lengths for successful face

management. The equivalent in mental deficiency research is a book by Robert Edgerton (1967) who studied the face managing efforts of people released from a large California institution for the retarded. Mental retardation can be as devastating a disfigurement of competence as having no nose is of one's appearance.

Edgerton's cases do not describe children in public schools, however. I found that (1) the existence or absence of neurological defects which interfere with school performance, whether or not they are publicly acknowledged, (2) official identification and classification of children, and (3) social isolation and stigmatization of children are three separate and often independent variables.

SECOND: While reformers recognized that educators participate in creating educational deviance they did not see that those same mechanisms which lead children to be socialized into careers of failure are used in defense of children to prevent that socialization.

In The Sociology of Teaching, Waller (1932) argues that school effectiveness depends on how well the precarious authority held by teachers is maintained and on the capacity of teachers to convince pupils to obey orders and to pay attention. When that authority breaks down, teachers tend to blame student scapegoats. Uncommitted classroom space, such as that in special education classes, and discretion for principals, perhaps to remove children to a special class quickly and without review, are important for the emotional protection of pupils. It also is important for re-establishing the authority of teachers, both for reasons of administrative efficiency and to prevent teachers from behaving destructively towards more than one student.

The fundamental error made by reformers has been in assuming that schools could be treated as though they were hierarchical bureaucracies which could be governed by rules. Waller's argument that schools must be seen as a field of

fighting groups which are independent and likely to be opposed to each other is closer to the mark. However much teachers may like children and try to provide a pleasant environment for them, it is profoundly threatening to a teacher to loose control of the class because the process of instruction in our schools is basically passive. The teachers make materials available to children but they do relatively little teaching in the socratic sense. Children learn, they are not taught. When students resist teacher commands they also are likely not to pay attention to studying. A breakdown in discipline means a teacher is failing in instruction as well. As Lortie (1969; 1975) and McPherson (1972) have shown in their studies of teachers, this breakdown is threatening to one's occupational self-image. For this reason teachers tend to see disruptive students as enemies, sometimes attacking them psychologically as in McIntyre's (1969) discussion of psychology in the schools.

It is this psychological attack, perhaps, indeed, using the instructors right to evaluate as a weapon to make children feel stupid, which stigmatizes. However it is not always those children with cognitive disabilities who teachers find most threatening. More likely, children who challenge the moral order of the school, often low income minority males, will be perceived as threatening by teachers. The stigma associated with special education misclassification is socially created in organizational battles like those between teachers and rebellious students in their classes. Faced with an escalating conflict in a regular class, a principal, a school psychologist or a special teacher may work to misclassify a child to get him out of a distructive situation and into a more benign special class environment just as McIntyre (1969) does in his case study. Misclassification may prevent rather than cause stigma unless the special class is <u>made</u> a punitive environment by school officials. Whether or not that has happened is a judgment that can only be made by actors in the situ-

ation. We cannot know just from looking at the case of a particular child what his organizational history has been or what strategies have been pursued by school officials. For this reason the positive and negative effects of blanket solutions such as those characterizing the reforms of the Education for All Handicapped Children Act tend to cancel each other out.

A Typology of Deviance Applied to Cognitive Disabilities.

The occurrence of stigmatization in programs for children with mild cognitive disabilities like educable mental retardation (IQ between 60 and 75) or learning disabilities is a function of the way the three variables intersect.

First, children may or may not be cognitively disabled to some extent, with their competence to perform in school limited either by a general depression of abilities relative to the population norm or by some specific communication blockage which interferes with particular activities. These have proven difficult qualities to measure reliably. This is largely because psychometricians have sought reliable and objective measures as opposed to using subjective accounts in diagnosing them to aid those providing programs in picking the handicapped members out of client populations. Children shown to be retarded by intelligence tests routinely turn out to be normal in all but school settings and often go on to lead normal adult lives (Jensen 1972; Mercer 1973; Stein and Susser 1970). Comparisons of diagnostic results on children supposedly suffering learning disabilities show high levels of disagreement (Bryant 1974; Grinspoon and Singer 1973; Sameroff 1978).

Cognitive disability is also a subjective condition, however, that of not being able to conform to the intellectual norms of a situation when one wants to. Where mental retardation, as described by Edgerton (1967) for example, may be described as being always at risk of non-conformity and of being identified as incompetent, learning disability may be characterized as a situation in which someone capable of performing normally in most situations is inexplicably

blocked from completing particular kinds of tasks.

Disabilities may be socially invisible and may remain unlabeled both by individuals and by others with whom they interact while at the same time impeding and frustrating the actor. For example, a student may be treated as though he is especially bright but may then find that he cannot do certain intellectual operations other pupils find simple. This may cause the student to perform in school work in a somewhat less gifted way, perhaps making him more "normal", and this may be quite frustrating to him. Unless this lapse is labeled a disability and explained as a specific kind of problem the student need not view his problem as any different or any more deviant than that of the student who does well in reading and poorly in math. Arguably both students are disabled in my terms. Students with specific disabilities are more likely to have their attention drawn to the peculiar character of their limitations because they may find that they cannot perform one of two apparently similar tasks.

The second variable relates to whether children are officially classified and placed in special programs. Generally, this classification is the final stage of an extended organizational process which selects children from regular classes, subjects them to various screening procedures and finally sanctions their referral (Kirp, Buss and Kuriloff 1974; Mercer 1973; ch. 5; Milofsky 1976, ch. 3). We must also consider children who are simply sent to special classes by regular school personnel, by-passing the official screening process. This classification represents official recognition of a student's educational deviance.

The third variable relates to whether or not students are stigmatized as "dummies". For the purposes of this analysis we will accept a loose definition of stigma. Theoretically, stigmatization involves two stages. First, the subject has some disfigurement---physical or social---which is publicly visible

and on which members of the community openly or subtly base ridicule of the subject. Second, the subject must admit that he or she possesses the disfigurement and seek to manipulate his or her public face to hide it. In schools, the stages are not always clear cut. Teachers or other children may ridicule a student for stupidity but their claims may not be accepted as in Labov (1972). Student sub-cultures may emerge which challenge the validity of other students' rights to establish and enforce criteria of intelligence or cleverness. Such sub-cultures may challenge the validity of the entire enterprise of schooling. Stigmatization in schools, thus, has a political dimension.

The stigma of stupidity occurs when a child is identified as deviant in school, when he accepts that he is deviant, and when the reason given for the identification is an intellectural flaw which has prevented the student from conforming to cognitive norms. We may recognize the claim that a child is cognitively inadequate as an accusation which effectively serves some control purpose and which is little founded in fact. The identification may also be made formally through the classification process or informally by a teacher or by the students in a class. Finally, stigmata refer to individuals and not to groups. Groups may be oppressed in schools and their individual members may act in a variety of ways. Rebellion is one way (Stinchcombe 1964). Internalizing feelings of inferiority and stupidity, accepting stigma, is another way of acting (Dexter 1964; Sennett and Cobb 1973).

The interaction of these variables produces eight ideal types of students relevant to special education as illustrated in Figure 1. As with all ideal

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FIGURE ONE HERE

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typologies this one is an oversimplicaton. The issues surrounding identification of cognitively handicapped students are very complicated and far from resolved. Thus, in practice, one cannot say with confidence whether particular children are or are not handicapped except in severe cases. Official identification is confused by the frequency with which school personnel ignore regulations and by the variation in program structure from district to district. The rule violations sometimes involve punitive misclassification but at other times they are largely administrative, such as when a special teacher is called in to help substitutes with particular children during a flu epidemic when many other teachers are out. Both the children and the regular school staff know that normal activities are not operating at such times and that substitutes are likely to have trouble handling classes. Being sent to a special class which has come to serve as a crisis center for a week is technically a case of misclassification but the long term consequences are very different than in the punitive misclassification case.

Despite the ambiguities of the variables, my in-school experiences suggest that the types produced by their intersection all exist and represent meaningful differences among students. The ambiguities of measurement would be important if the goal of this paper were to show that a certain proportion of the school population were composed of the different types. My aim, however, is simply to show that "misclassification" as the concept appears in contemporary policy ananlysis and legislation implies a gross misinterpretation of what it means that some IQ scores have apparently been improperly collected or reported in the process of placing children in special education classes. That falsification may as well represent the efforts of well intentioned educators to protect children from destructive regular school teachers as some malignant purpose. Failure to classify children may be as serious a deprevention of educational opportunity as is affixing of inaccurate labels. This becomes clearer when examples of each type, except Type Eight, "The Normals", are considered. They

are gathered from my field observations except where otherwise cited.

Seven Student Cases.

1) The Socialized Cognitively Disabled

Lars is a twelve-year-old boy who is extremely talkative, overactive and intelligent. Meeting him in his special class, he was friendly and articulately explained in great detail each activity he was going to undertake before beginning. This meant a constant flow of words since he could not sit still for more than a minute or two. In addition to being extremely restless and constantly active, Lars had trouble with his physical coordination. He could not walk the balance beam nor could he catch a thrown ball. His teacher constructed exercises to work on this, like having him spin around and then try to hit a target with a bean bag. His activeness and clumsiness led him to be excluded by the other students in the school, however. When I accompanied him to recess, noone else would play handball with him and occasionally other children ran through his game, bumping into him as thought he were not there.

2) The Socially Normal, Cognitively Disabled.

Sherwin is a slight, handsome, twelve-year-old boy. He is naturally quite and introverted, so no one realized he was several years behind in reading skills until an alert teacher of educationally handicapped children noticed him. Though Sherwin has been in a gifted class, attends summer institutes in entymology at a nearby college, can easily read words like "astronomy" and "exploration" and quickly tabbed me (correctly) a sociologist, he cannot read words like "but" or "in" because he has a perceptual handicap that causes him not to see letters. He can fill in the blanks when he reads "astronomy" but short words become alphabet soup, so he has never progressed beyond the second-grade level in reading achievement. While his learning disability caused him much frustration, leading him to hate school, it did little to hurt his standing

with teachers or other students. He was smart enough to compensate and satisfy the former and he was not successful enough in school to intimidate the latter. His special teacher had helped him to realize that his inability to do school work was the result of a specific problem and that his limitations had little to do with his basic intelligence. With this understanding he was trying to learn which situations tended to cause him problems and to find ways of correcting his misperceptions.

3) Labeled, Stigmatized Students.

Paco is a Mexican-American boy who was supposed to be attending Mrs. Lambert's special class at Sunnydale School while I worked there. He refused to attend the class, however, because he found it intensely embarrassing and demeaning. Though he did not do school work well, his desire to stay out of the special class made him a well-behaved and hard working student. His regular teacher liked him and enjoyed the challenge of working with him and so he stayed in the regular classroom with the special teacher monitoring his progress.

This behavior was a great change from the previous year when he spend much of his time in the special class. During that time, Mrs. Jackson was his regular teacher. She had been acknowledged by the principal, other teachers and students to be incompetent. She not only had trouble instructing children adequately, she frequently became embroiled in violent feuds with children. Paco was a target of her anger and she apparently often sent him to the office with the parting words, "Get out of my room you little MR!" Mrs. Lambert was not aware of this until Paco asked her if he was mentally retarded. Shortly afterwards, Paco's mother complained to the superintendent who reprimanded Mrs. Jackson. His mother's action was too late to prevent Paco from being severely traumatized.

4) The Constructively Labeled.

George was a typical student in Mrs. Lambert's Hillside School special class in that there was no pretense among school officials that he had any physiologically caused learning disability. He has been screened and classified as educationally handicapped because he was far behind his age group and was becoming a behavior problem. George's case was different from other students and pivotal for the special class, however, because of problems in his family and the concerted support school officials were able to give him during a period of crisis.

Just when he was becoming used to the special class and beginning to work well, Mrs. Lambert reported, his parents had a fight which resulted in all of the family's children being put in the county reformatory in protective custody. When Mrs. Lambert found out about this she contacted the principal and George's regular teacher to find out if there was some way they could have him taken out of the reformatory. After a week of red tape and searching the neighborhood, a temporary foster home was located in the school district and George was able to return to school. Upon his return the class threw a welcoming party for him. Mrs. Lambert says that from that day on the class began working hard and making unusual progress. Within two years several students had gained nearly four years in reading skills and were near their grade level. She claims this was largely the result of the group spirit in the special class which made the students overcome their negative feelings toward school. When I observed the class the students were indeed more enthusiastic and hard working than in other classes I had visited. They also all read easily from advanced readers. Though all of the students were "labeled" educationally handicapped, that labeling was basic to their educational rehabilitation.

5) The Regular Class "Dummy".

Billy is a second grader who transferred to Hooker School this year. He has emotional problems and there is some possibility of minor brain damage. But in first grade last year, his teacher was able to handle him in a regular class with supportive assistance from the principal. Unfortunately, the teacher and principal at Hooker do not get along well so this support is not available to his second grade teacher, Mrs. Demelick. His behavior soon became intolerable to her and she responded by not permitting any misbehavior from him and insisting on adequate school work. Both these things were beyond his capacity all the time (or any child's for that matter). Mrs. Demelick responded to his lapses with increasing anger. The more domineering she became, the more frustrated, anxious and unable to work was Billy. Finally, McIntyre, the school psychologist, who knew Billy at the previous school, was invited into the room to observe. While he tried to convince Mrs. Demelick that Billy could be worked with in the room, she insisted he was mentally retarded, not her responsibility and should be placed in a special class. In light of the damage to Billy and to Mrs. Demelick's ability to work with other students, McIntyre finally agreed to refer him to a special education class (McIntyre, 1969: 71-75).

6) The Unidentified Cognitively Disabled.

Jeff is one of the hardest working children I have met. Despite his efforts, he remains the slowest child in Mrs. Henry's first grade class. Working with him is frustrating. Though he writes the numerals 7, 8, 9, on the blackboard over and over, he immediately forgets which numerals go with which numbers. His mind is like a sieve. Despite this slow progress, Mrs. Henry is infinitely patient and accepting. I asked her whether she thought Jeff might not have a learning disability of some kind. She said, "No, some children are just very slow. His

brother was in my class and he had the same problem. If you are patient with them, some children like Jeff just straighten out with time." Several months later the speech teacher gave Jeff an intelligence test and he proved to be borderline gifted. This still did not convince Mrs. Henry that he should be sent to a special class or that she should change her strategy.

7) Self-Stigmatizing Students.

Dan is a high school student observed in a German class. His performance was somewhat below average for the class but he earned C grades. Since he participated actively in class and was always friendly and cooperative, his teacher, Mr. Clifford, felt the boy deserved the average grade. Dan disagreed, however. He came from a middle class family in which intelligence and academic success were valued and usual among the children. He felt he was not working hard at German and chastised himself for this. He had decided that he did poorly in the subject from lack of effort. Were that true, he thought Mr. Clifford should not be giving him adequate grades. He saw the grades as a gift illegitimately given. Consequently, he tried to convince the teacher he deserved to fail the class.

8) Normals.

Misclassification and the Typology of Deviance.

This typology and the accompanying cases indicate that the excesses special education reformers are concerned about represent only some of the types of educational deviance one encounters. The central concern of the due process reforms embodied in the Education for All Handicapped Children Act is to greatly reduce the number of "Labeled, Stigmatized Students", Type Three (Paco). Special education programs are a necessary evil for "Socialized Cognitively Disabled Students", Type One (Lars). These students will not profit from a regular school program and though they will be stigmatized special programs are the only alternative. Of special concern in the act are the "Unidentified Cognitively Dis-

abled Students", Type Six (Jeff). If schools treat special classes as primarily social control rather than therapeutic settings there will be little interest in referring children who do not learn in regular class settings. Further, the space in special classes will be taken by discipline problems so that needy children must wait for an opening even if they should be referred.

Describing students at risk to be socialized into careers as educational deviants or failures in terms of a typology such as this one is helpful because we clearly see the counter-examples to those chosen by special education reformers. In contrast to the Labeled Stigmatized Students one finds "Constructively Labeled Students", Type Four (George), for whom the threat of failure is an effective incentive to take school seriously once again. In this group as well as in the "Regular Class 'Dummy'", Type Five (Billy), one recognizes students who are more effectively stigmatized as stupid in regular classrooms than they would be in special classes. Finally, one finds "Socially Normal, Cognitively Disabled Students," Type Two (Sherwin), who are not stigmatized by membership in special classes and where the treatment is quite specific to the disability and relatively little colored by social effects.

The typology and its associated examples demonstrate three things. First, there are important cases where labeling a child cognitively handicapped when he is normal or placing a child in a more restrictive environment than is warranted by the severity of his disability are in the best interests of students. Second, those cases where misclassification or unnecessarily restrictive placements are negative are superficially identical to those where the effects are positive. Only with detailed information about the setting of the kind available to school psychologists and other personnel charged with making classification decisions can one make predictions about the impacts of different official actions. Third,

because research used to support arguments for passage of the Education for All Handicapped Children Act did not seek to measure the positive effects of misclassification, perhaps because it was politically inspired research, we do not know whether the positive or negative consequences of misclassification are more common even in those places where special education excesses are common such as in ghetto areas of big cities.

It is almost certainly true that prohibiting misclassification across the board, as the Education for All Handicapped Children Act has done, will almost certainly have serious negative results which will neutralize its effectiveness, at least as far as educational outcomes are concerned. What has been ignored in this legislation is that much of the strength of public special education is that its employees have been relatively free agents in schools. As I have elsewhere argued, special educators may allow their programs to be used as dumping grounds for discipline problems as a way of buying into regular school processes (Milofsky 1974). In this way they may be coopted to support the stigmatization of students as mentally handicapped for social control reasons. This same freedom allows special educators to act as independent agents in schools to give advice to teachers, support principals who find themselves in difficult straits and to intervene on behalf of students when they are targets of regular teacher hostility as in the case of Billy and Mrs. Demelick in Type Five above. On the other hand the special education reforms trade the students previously stigmatized by special class placement for the students now stigmatized by remaining in regular classes. If stigma is our concern, it may well be that more children will now be stigmatized than were before.

More seriously, the special education reforms interfere with the free agency of special educators, an aspect of their work which might be providing the greatest payoffs for children. Special educators are tied down with large amounts of new paperwork, by mandated due process hearings and by required interdisciplinary

cooperation which sometimes inhibits the free play of any one discipline. That is, psychologists may find themselves blocked from gathering information about families because that now is the job of social workers in the interdisciplinary evaluation process. Lacking this knowledge psychologists are required to rely more on test results than many would like and the result may be less accurate testing. Special educators are more and more blocked from treating the interactional setting in which failure occurs and forced to assume that failure is a personal problem of children. Because of this they are less able to prevent student stigmatization than they were before.

The Social Costs of Stigmatizing Students.

My goal in presenting this argument is not, as one might guess, to minimize the seriousness of stigmatization arising from misclassification in schools or to question the importance of equality of educational opportunity as a social policy objective. Rather in the course of my field work I was struck by the frequency with which special education classes were used for illegitimate but constructive purposes. This runs counter to most educators' perceptions that special educators are particularly incompetent and that special education excesses are largely the fault of failures in program structure. If my experiences are representative, the most effective kinds of special education reforms for preventing the stigmatization of children in special classes would be ones which support the independence of special educators, which increase the level of collegiality within their ranks, and which would provide them with ways of denying demands from regular educators that students be removed to special classes just because they are discipline problems. In short, rather than introducing reforms which increase administrative controls over special educators, I would introduce ones which strengthen their professional community and its controls over members so that judgments about student case dispositions might be made with more integ-

rity.

This is not an argument for higher credentials. It rather is based on that theory of school organizations first stated by Waller (1932) which sees public education systems as composed of a collection of semi-independent fighting groups, all competing to advance purposes specific to themselves. Special educators are one such group and like the other group in schools they possess strategic advantages and weaknesses which are inherent in their role and in their organizational position.

By distinguishing disability, official identification and stigmatization as I have done in this paper, we see more clearly what is gained when special educators manage to fight well for the interests of children. This is not to say that they always or even often fight well. The cases suggest, however, that special educators might serve children well more often were they to have the resources to resist demands, made by regular school officials, that special education be used punitively. Conversely, special programs are more likely to be exploited to serve social control needs if resources special educators need to fight for an interactional conception of why children fail are denied. Administrative controls reduce the natural advantages of special educators and make it easier for regular educators to control them. I am proposing that by supporting their sense of professionalism, to the extent it exists among special educators, we would make members more committed in resisting domination of their programs by regular educators.

Arguing in favor of student misclassification as I have done brings one face-to-face with a dilemma underlying special education of the kind discussed here. The problem is not that children being misclassified is unacceptable in

schools. In fact this is one of the few means available by which flexibility is introduced given the realities of such public schooling in America. The problem is that there is too much misclassification in certain inner city areas. Because urban schools face a crisis of legitimacy, teachers increasingly find their authority challenged and feel that the integrity of their teaching is being undermined by a lapse of discipline (Rubel 1977). Informal measures like misclassification in schools have become a means by which middle class officials control lower class children in an often oppressive institution. In such schools special education cannot be reformed unless the institution of public schooling is reformed because, inevitably, special education is subordinate to regular education.

One might argue that administrative controls are the most effective reform available here because it is not feasible politically to eliminate special education or to cut it out of inner city schools. We have chosen rather to try neutering it by tieing up its representatives in red tape. This solution is little better than doing nothing if my argument is correct, however. What given special education a measure of effectiveness is the capacity of the representatives to fight for an interactional construction of student failure. The programs do not go away if special educators are denied this freedom. The programs just become easier for regular educators to exploit.

The great irony of the due process reforms in the Education for All Handicapped Children Act is, thus, that they interfere with, rather than guarantee, the protection of individual student interests by concerned school officials. This is particularly insidious because the claim that special education is reformed undermines public demands that minority children no longer be officially labeled cognitively handicapped for problems which actually are institutional. The practice goes on. Rather than making it easier for the rights and interests of children to be defended, however, we have provided schools with strong new in-

stitutional defenses against public criticism for this sort of educational excess.

FIGURE ONE: A Typology of Deviance and Stigma in Special Education

Part A. Children who are officially identified.

| | | COGNITIVELY DISABLED | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | YES | NO |
| STIGMATIZED | YES | Type One. The Socialized Cognitively Disabled. Students acknowledge the legitimacy of their deviant status and adapt to being isolated by stigmatization. | Type Three. Labeled Stigmatized Students. Students who are intellectually normal but who are nonetheless treated as classroom dummies and are placed in special classes. |
| | NO | Type Two. The Socially Normal Cognitively Disabled. Students suffer handicaps and have been placed in special classes. The handicaps are such that they are not spontaneously recognized by teachers and by other students and thus do not lead to stigmatization. | Type Four. The Constructively Labeled. Students do not suffer deficiencies and both they and school officials know it. Students are nonetheless placed in special classes. The placement may allow for greater individualization in instruction. and real improvement in student academic performance. |

FIGURE ONE: A Typology of Deviance and Stigma in Special Education (continued)

Part B. Children who are not officially identified.

| | | COGNITIVELY DISABLED | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | YES | NO |
| STIGMATIZED | YES | Type Five. The Regular Class "Dummy". Students cannot do regular class school work because of neurological, social or psychological deficiencies. This is recognized and they are treated as inferior by peers and teachers though these students are not placed in special classes. | Type Seven. Self-Stigmatizing Students. Students who, though intellectually normal and not officially identified as slow learners, feel that they are not achieving as well as they should. They consequently decide that they are stupid or lazy. |
| | NO | Type Six. The Unidentified Cognitively Disabled. Students suffer genuine cognitive disabilities but they are not recognized by teachers or by peers. Their deficiencies may not prevent students from adapting to classroom demands or docility may prevent the students from being identified by teachers and hard to work with. | Type Eight. Normals. Students who suffer no disabilities, are not seen as handicapped by teachers and who are not officially identified. |

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